



AAR GUEDJ GUI AK NAPAGI  
SAVE THE COAST AND FISHERIES  
SAUVER LA MER ET LA PECHE



# WHITE PAPER

THREAT BELOW THE SURFACE: OFFSHORE DRILLING IN SENEGAL  
POSES ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC, AND HUMAN HEALTH RISKS





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Offshore drilling projects in Senegal pose significant risks to community health, traditional livelihoods, and marine ecosystems. These impacts threaten food security and community well-being, exacerbating vulnerabilities in a region already affected by sea level rise, coastal erosion, and other climate-change-related stressors.

While international corporations extract offshore resources and generate pollution for foreign profit, Senegalese communities disproportionately bear the resulting environmental and social costs. Insurance coverage plays a critical role in enabling offshore oil and gas development.

However, the absence of publicly disclosed insurance information for Senegal's offshore projects warrants closer examination of the environmental, economic, and human rights harms associated with these developments, as well as the heightened risks communities face when insurance accountability and transparency are lacking.

This white paper presents the latest research on Senegal's offshore oil and gas expansion, identifying the primary corporate beneficiaries and the insurers that finance them at the expense of local communities. It examines how these projects undermine human rights, challenge Senegal's climate commitments, and pose significant economic, public-health, and environmental risks for Senegalese communities.

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## Introduction

Senegal is aggressively pursuing development of its oil and gas infrastructure, including the massive Greater Tortue Ahmeyim project, the Sangomar deepwater field, the Yakaar–Teranga offshore gas project, the Sendou and Cap des Biches gas-to-power plants, and the Diamniadio and Saint-Louis industrial gas hubs. While framed as essential to national growth, these projects pose significant economic, environmental, and human-health risks especially for coastal and fishing communities already facing climate stress.

Offshore drilling and onshore processing threaten marine and coastal ecosystems, fisheries, and wetlands, with deepwater operations carrying high risks of spills, habitat disruption, and damage to local communities. Communities near the Sendou and Cap des Biches plants report worsening air pollution, soot deposition, and respiratory complaints, while inadequate monitoring leaves residents with little transparency about emissions or water contamination.

Economically, heavy reliance on fossil-fuel megaprojects creates high public-finance exposure and diverts investment from water systems, coastal protection, and renewable energy. Infrastructure tied to foreign operators risks locking Senegal into decades of debt and volatile global oil and gas markets. Meanwhile, promises of job creation and energy affordability have remained limited, with most benefits accruing to foreign firms rather than local communities.

A central concern is the cumulative pollution footprint: coastal effluent from offshore operations, wastewater from processing facilities, thermal pollution, and the expansion of industrial zones adjacent to already stressed water bodies. These threats further endanger drinking water sources and fisheries that millions rely on for income and food security.

Traditional livelihoods are disappearing and unemployment is rising, rich natural resources are being abused, and politicians are making questionable deals with international parties. Fishing, a backbone of Senegal's economy and way of life, already strained by overexploitation, is existentially threatened by the oil and gas projects now under development. Senegal is at risk, like many developing countries sold a dream by foreign corporations, but the Senegalese people have the chance to limit the country's dependence on fossil fuels.

Another crucial issue in the development of the oil and gas drilling projects is government transparency. Across the full portfolio of oil and gas development, Senegal lacks transparent environmental and health monitoring, meaningful community consultation, and robust safeguards to protect water and public health.

A national energy strategy centered on oil and gas expansion may ultimately weaken rather than strengthen economic resilience, environmental security, and community well-being.

Key to the transparency issues in the Senegalese offshore drilling projects is the lack of information on insurance coverage. While Senegalese law requires local insurers to be involved in oil and gas projects, the coverage provided by the collective pool of Senegalese insurers does not nearly cover the potential damages from a spill or disaster. While it is highly likely that international insurance companies are involved as insurers and reinsurers of the offshore drilling projects, these insurance certificates have yet to be made public. As such, it is unclear whether the offshore drilling projects have adequate insurance coverage, or which insurance companies are providing coverage. Without adequate insurance coverage, disaster-related costs would be offloaded onto local communities. High-risk operations like offshore drilling demand greater transparency to protect communities, sovereignty, health and human rights.

The current projects completed or under construction came into existence through exaggerated benefits and under examined risks. By reviewing the potential benefits and risks of these projects and a fossil fuel-dependent future, it is clear that oil and gas are not in the interest of the Senegalese people. Senegal can decide to forgo fossil fuel projects in favor of lower-cost and cleaner renewable energy infrastructure.

### **Greater Tortue Ahmeyim Project**

The Greater Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA) project is a massive offshore natural gas development that sits on the maritime border between Senegal and Mauritania. The GTA project is controlled by a consortium led overwhelmingly by foreign oil majors, with BP, a British multinational oil and gas company holding a dominant 56 percent stake and serving as the project's operator. Kosmos Energy, an American oil company, follows as the second-largest partner with 27 percent. Senegal and Mauritania participate through their national oil companies, but with comparatively small shares: Petrosen, Senegal's national oil company holds only 10 percent on behalf of Senegal, while Société Mauritanienne des Hydrocarbures et de Patrimoine Minier, Mauritania's national oil company represents Mauritania with a 7 percent interest. It is unknown what companies have insured the GTA project, and to what extent.

To bring the gas to market, the project uses a highly complex two-vessel system. Gas is extracted from deepwater wells and first processed on a floating production, storage and offloading vessel (FPSO), which removes water and impurities. From there, the gas travels by pipeline to the floating liquefied natural gas (FLNG) facility—an enormous vessel named *Gimi*—anchored about 10 kilometers offshore. The FLNG unit cools the processed gas into liquefied natural gas (LNG), stores it, and

loads it onto carriers for export to international markets. Its four liquefaction trains can produce about 2.3 million tonnes of LNG per year, and the facility operates under a long-term lease.

### **Sangomar Project**

The Sangomar field, located about 100 kilometers south of Dakar, is the country's first deepwater oil project. Sangomar is operated by Woodside Energy, an Australian petroleum company in partnership with Petrosen. Petrosen holds an 18 percent stake while Woodside holds 82 percent. A pool of Senegalese insurance companies insured Sangomar for \$13 million.<sup>1</sup> Additional international insurers are unknown. Phase I of the development brings together an FPSO vessel, subsea wells, and infrastructure to extract both oil and gas. The Sangomar development also involves subsea pipelines, risers, and onshore facilities for storage, processing, and export logistics. Sangomar produced its first oil in June 2024, and output is projected to rise steadily as more wells and infrastructure are added. Phase II and potential expansions are being evaluated, which could include additional wells and increased FPSO capacity.

### **Yakaar-Teranga Project**

Yakaar-Teranga is another offshore gas development led by Kosmos Energy together with Petrosen. While Petrosen had a targeted final investment decision (FID) of 2025, no FID has been made public, and the project has changed hands numerous times. In 2023, BP exited the project, giving Kosmos, the U.S. energy company, a 90 percent stake. However, in December 2025, Senegal announced plans to nationalize the project and operate it entirely under Petrosen.<sup>2</sup> Kosmos' license for the Yakaar-Teranga gas field expires in July 2026. Yakaar-Teranga is one of the largest gas discoveries in recent years, estimated to hold around 25 trillion cubic feet of advantaged gas-in-place.<sup>3</sup> Information regarding insurance coverage of Yakaar-Teranga is unknown.

### **Réseau Gazier du Sénégal**

Senegal is advancing a national gas-pipeline network designed to transport production from the offshore drilling fields to power plants, industrial zones, and major urban areas. This system, known as the Réseau Gazier du Sénégal, is planned as a multi-phase pipeline stretching several hundred kilometers across the country

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.africabusinessplus.com/en/802340/sangomar-le-pool-dassureurs-senegalais-decroche-un-pr-emier-marche-aupres-de-woodside-energy-13-millions/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.zawya.com/en/business/energy/senegal-plans-to-nationalise-kosmos-run-yakaar-teranga-gas-project-wr17390m>

<sup>3</sup><https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Senegal-Moves-to-Seize-Kosmos-Offshore-Gas-Project.html>

and is expected to carry up to several billion cubic meters of gas per year once completed. The government has presented the project as a cornerstone of its “Gas-to-Power” strategy, intended to convert existing oil- and coal-fired power plants to gas and supply expanding industrial hubs.

The project, however, comes with significant financial, environmental, and governance implications. With an estimated cost of roughly \$1 billion, the pipeline represents a substantial investment whose viability depends on the long-term profitability of the offshore fields—creating potential debt exposure if gas revenues fall short. The construction and operation of such a large pipeline system also introduces risks to land and water resources, as leaks or ruptures can contaminate soil, groundwater, and surface water, particularly where the pipeline crosses sensitive areas. Communities along the proposed route face additional concerns related to land disturbance, safety, and whether they will share in the benefits of the infrastructure they are expected to host.

Transparency remains a key issue. As with the offshore developments, many communities report limited access to project information, unclear consultation processes, and incomplete disclosure of environmental and social risks. The lack of clarity around emergency response protocols, insurance coverage, and long-term liability raises further questions about whether the protections in place are adequate in the event of an accident.

In the broader context of Senegal’s energy transition, the gas-pipeline network illustrates the trade-offs inherent in large-scale fossil fuel infrastructure. While policy makers view gas as a bridge fuel for domestic energy security, the scale of the investment risks locking the country into a long-term dependence on fossil fuels at a moment when global markets are shifting and climate impacts are intensifying. For communities, particularly those whose water resources are already under pressure, these choices carry lasting consequences for environmental health, equity, and sustainable development.

## **Environmental Concerns**

### *Risks to Biodiversity*

Offshore drilling brings a heightened risk of oil spills, chemical discharges, and other pollutants entering marine and coastal waters. Even small-scale leaks can devastate coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds — ecosystems critical to water filtration, coastal protection, and biodiversity.

The offshore drilling projects threaten environmental sanctuaries and biodiversity hotspots. Djoudj National Park, less than 35 kilometers from the terminal of the GTA

gas project, is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and the third largest bird reserve in the world. As one of the last remaining green areas in the Sahel, the park is crucial to minimizing desertification and mitigating the effects of climate change.<sup>4</sup>

Diawling National Park, classified as a Ramsar Wetland and protected by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), is located less than five kilometers from GTA. Diawling is home to important mangrove and acacia forests, and would be devastated by an oil or gas spill.

The GTA project also risks damaging the world's largest cold-water coral reef, which stretches 580 kilometers down the Mauritanian coast to Senegal. The reef stores immense amounts of carbon and is one of the most biodiverse areas in the world.

Under their "second green strategy," BP announced "no-go areas," including UNESCO World Heritage sites and areas covered by the IUCN's classification system for protected areas. BP has also committed to achieving net positive impacts on biodiversity on new projects from 2022 onwards. GTA's proximity to Senegal's national parks and wildlife areas undermine BP's promised commitments as the project overlaps many sensitive ecosystems of significant importance.

Sangomar and GTA threaten numerous biodiversity hotspots in Senegal, including the St. Louis Marine Protected Area, the Barbarie National Park, and the Saloum Delta National Park. These areas are home to hundreds of threatened species, from sea turtles to migratory birds to fish. Through spills, contaminated waterways, destruction to reefs and other habitats, sound pollution and more, drilling activities pose an immediate danger to the survival of Senegal's rich ecosystems and biodiversity.

### *Climate Impacts*

Senegal's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), its committed greenhouse gas emissions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), includes a commitment to reduce GHG emissions by five and seven percent by 2025 and 2030 respectively.<sup>5</sup> Offshore drilling projects entering Senegal into the oil and gas producing market are at direct odds to these commitments, and are projected to produce millions of tons of carbon dioxide emissions by 2028. Drilling in Senegal will increase global emissions at a time when it is imperative for countries to phase out fossil fuels in order to lessen the worst of climate change, and Senegal, as the 32nd most vulnerable country to climate change, will be hit particularly hard. Sea level rise due to climate change has already destroyed homes

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/mab/delta-du-fleuve-senegal>

<sup>5</sup> <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/CDNSenegal20approuvée-pdf-.pdf>

on the Bargny coast and forced communities to flee, while rising sea temperatures are altering fish migrations.

## **Economic Risks**

### *Debt and Financing*

Economically, the projects require significant foreign capital, and production-sharing terms limit the state's revenue while exposing Senegal to volatile global oil and gas prices. The ownership of offshore oil and gas projects remains unequal, with the Senegalese government and people taking on the risks without reaping the benefits. While Petrosen owns only 10 percent of GTA and 18 percent of Sangomar, the majority of profits will go to Woodside, BP, Kosmos, and other foreign investors.

The ownership structure of these projects underscores their reliance on foreign capital while also highlighting the limited equity positions—and therefore limited control—of Senegal who supplies the resource itself.

Petrosen borrowed 275 billion CFA francs, roughly \$450 million, from Woodside to finance its share in the development of the Sangomar field. The loan has an initial repayment period of five years, with the ability to extend two years, at an interest rate of 6.5 percent. The debt burden “represents a significant portion of Petrosen’s future revenues” and “raises the question of the company's ability to repay its debt without compromising its revenues.”<sup>6</sup> Petrosen similarly borrowed from BP and Kosmos Energy to participate in the GTA project to the amount of \$290 million with a similar interest rate of 6.5 percent amounting to millions of dollars in revenue for Kosmos per year.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, Senegal's revenue forecasts from oil and gas exploitation have been revised downward for the period 2026-2028 following recent disruptions in the global oil and gas market, particularly the drop in crude oil prices. A 2025 report estimates earnings of only 227.22 billion CFA francs over the next three years, with 61.59 billion CFA francs in 2026 (previously estimated at 87.87 billion CFA francs), 91.93 billion CFA francs in 2027 (previously estimated at 155.20 billion CFA francs) and 73.70 billion CFA francs in 2028.<sup>8</sup>

Open Oil, the leading provider of financial analysis on natural resources to governments globally, noted that Petrosen may never earn enough money from

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<sup>6</sup>[https://senego.com/petrosen-avait-emprunte-275-milliards-f-cfa-a-woodside-largent-du-petrole-servira-t-il-dabord-a-rembourser-la-dette\\_1710393.html](https://senego.com/petrosen-avait-emprunte-275-milliards-f-cfa-a-woodside-largent-du-petrole-servira-t-il-dabord-a-rembourser-la-dette_1710393.html)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1509991/000150999124000029/kos-20231231.htm>

<sup>8</sup>[https://seneweb.com/news/Chronique/petrole-et-gaz-la-desillusion-du-senegal\\_n\\_474694.html](https://seneweb.com/news/Chronique/petrole-et-gaz-la-desillusion-du-senegal_n_474694.html)

these projects to repay the loans.<sup>9</sup> A case study of Senegal's oil and gas projects published in 2020 noted that the total net present value of Senegal's current oil and gas projects might be worth \$1 billion, not even enough to service one year of Senegal's current debt. That was before Petrosen borrowed more to increase its participation in Sangomar and GTA. These projects will at best reach two percent of the annual Senegalese budget in the 2030s, and worst case risk becoming loss-making investments.<sup>10</sup>

Senegal is already facing a debt crisis. A 2024 audit revealed a higher debt and budget deficit than previously reported, leading to the IMF freezing a \$1.8 billion aid program.<sup>11</sup> Inflation has led to a cost of living crisis that has seen rent and food prices soar. The cost of fresh fish increased 15.3 percent in the third quarter of 2024 alone, while leafy vegetables increased 25.4 percent.<sup>12</sup>

### *Threats to the Fishing Industry*

Fishing is a vital economic activity for Senegal, responsible for around 3.2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>13</sup> Even at peak production, oil and gas drilling would generate less revenue, estimated at three percent of national GDP. The annual catch rate is 450,000 metric tons (MT) per annum, making it the second largest fish producer in West Africa (after Nigeria 530,000 MT). Fish account for 10.2 percent of the country's exports. Conservative estimates put over 600,000 people employed by fishing activities. Artisanal fishing accounts for 80 percent of the catch in Senegal, with most fishing sites located in Dakar, Saint-Louis, Kaya, Joal-Fadiouth, Mbour, Rufisque, and Bargny. In 2018, artisanal fisheries alone supplied 95 percent of the national market and accounted for 1.6 percent of GDP.<sup>14</sup>

Fishing accounts for 70 percent of animal protein intake in Senegalese diets. However, fish consumption is declining. Senegalese people consumed on average 41kg of fish per year in 2003 but only 29 kg in 2021. The overall decline is primarily due to climate change, with other factors being illegal fishing, overexploitation, and strong competition from external markets demanding exports. Even artisanal

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<sup>9</sup><https://koinon.consulting/wp/portfolio/senegals-stranded-assets-the-impact-of-covid-19-and-energy-transition-on-the-offshore-petroleum-sector/>

<sup>10</sup><https://koinon.consulting/wp/portfolio/senegals-stranded-assets-the-impact-of-covid-19-and-energy-transition-on-the-offshore-petroleum-sector/>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.ecofinagency.com/finance/2910-46080-senegal-s-1-8bn-imf-program-frozen-finance-minister-confirms#:~:text=Diba20explained20that20the20aid20freeze20follows,government20in20September2020uncovered20worsening20public20finances>

<sup>12</sup>[https://www.pressafrik.com/Senegal-Les-prix-a-la-consommation-augmentent-de-1-au-troisieme-trimestre-2024-selon-l-ANSD\\_a281159.html#:~:text=Les20prix20de20C2AB20produits20alimentaires,frais20\(2B152C32025\)](https://www.pressafrik.com/Senegal-Les-prix-a-la-consommation-augmentent-de-1-au-troisieme-trimestre-2024-selon-l-ANSD_a281159.html#:~:text=Les20prix20de20C2AB20produits20alimentaires,frais20(2B152C32025))

<sup>13</sup>[https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Fisheries20and20Aquaculture20in20Senegal\\_Dakar\\_Senegal\\_SG2022-0015.pdf](https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Fisheries20and20Aquaculture20in20Senegal_Dakar_Senegal_SG2022-0015.pdf)

<sup>14</sup>[https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Fisheries20and20Aquaculture20in20Senegal\\_Dakar\\_Senegal\\_SG2022-0015.pdf](https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Fisheries20and20Aquaculture20in20Senegal_Dakar_Senegal_SG2022-0015.pdf)

fishermen have begun to switch from supplying the domestic market with pelagic fish to catching demersal fish (octopus, squid and cuttlefish), more popular for export.

As a result, Senegal's fish imports are increasing annually. Imports in 2018 were 3,300 MT and increased to 8,872 MT in 2020, an increase of 280 percent. However, the relatively low quantity of imports does not cover the local demand for fish with a gap of 150,000 MT annually. Average fish prices in Senegal from 2000–2016 were six to 14 times higher than the average prices recorded between 1980 and 2000.<sup>15</sup> Increasing fish prices are contributing to the cost of living crisis in Senegal.

Oil and gas projects only exacerbate the fishing crisis. Fossil fuel infrastructure cuts off access to vital fishing grounds, areas that fisherfolk have relied on for centuries. The safety exclusion zone surrounding the GTA project infrastructure bars fishers from entering, leading to a significant reduction in fishing area. The president of the association of artisanal line fishers in Saint Louis says that fishers “have received nothing in terms of compensation”.<sup>16</sup> GTA has already brought the Saint Louis region unemployment and increased poverty. Rather than the promised economic gains, the GTA project is bringing unemployment and increased poverty to the area. Many fishers have quit and undertaken the risky migration to Europe, while others fish illegally in Mauritania, facing arrest or death from the Mauritanian coastguard.<sup>17</sup> Some women have turned to sex work to support their families, as they have lost their livelihoods as fish processors.<sup>18</sup>

Fishing is also threatened in the south of the country, near the Saloum Delta. Fishing and shellfish have sustained life in the delta for generations, leading the region to be named a UNESCO world heritage site due to the presence of 218 shellfish mounds and burial sites.<sup>19</sup> Now, the Sangomar drilling infrastructure blocks access to fishing areas, reducing fish populations, and threatening further devastation from oil spills.

Coastal fisheries sustain thousands of Senegalese families. Oil contamination and habitat disruption can collapse fish stocks, directly undermining food security and local economies. Tourism and artisanal fishing, essential sources of income, are also at risk from environmental degradation. The offshore drilling projects jeopardize the fishing industry, the livelihoods and wellbeing of coastal communities, and the national economy in exchange for a fossil fuel gamble, which even at peak

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<sup>15</sup>[https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Fisheries20and20Aquaculture20in20Senegal\\_Dakar\\_Senegal\\_SG2022-0015.pdf](https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Fisheries20and20Aquaculture20in20Senegal_Dakar_Senegal_SG2022-0015.pdf)

<sup>16</sup><https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2021/06/21/bp-gas-west-africa-senegal-mauritania-coral-reef/>

<sup>17</sup><https://fr.africanews.com/2018/01/29/mort-d-un-pecheur-senegalais-la-mauritanie-applee-a-s-expliquer/#:~:text=Il20y20a20un20an,avait20mC3AAme20condamnC3A920l'incident>

<sup>18</sup><https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/04/14/communités-can-fall-apart-senegal-gas-project-drives-locals-to-desperation>

<sup>19</sup><https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/1359/>

production would generate less GDP and employ a fraction of the number of Senegalese.

### *Woodside's Tax Dispute*

In August 2024, Woodside Energy commenced legal action in Dakar against Senegal after the government assessed that the company owed 41 billion CFA francs (\$68.68 million) in taxes for its operations at Sangomar. Woodside continues to dispute the tax assessment in the High Court of Dakar, and in May 2025 filed arbitration proceedings with the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes.<sup>20</sup> Senegal, under its new government, has promised to reevaluate its energy contracts and assess that they are in the national best interest. Woodside's legal action is an aggressive stance against the country, and demonstrates that – against what it publicly espouses – its interests are not the economic development of Senegal but maximizing profits. Woodside's tax dispute limits the financial benefits Senegal could receive from its oil resources and wastes the country's resources defending against Woodside's legal action.

## **Health and Human Rights Impacts**

### *Insurance Accountability and Community Risk*

Insurance plays a central role in enabling offshore oil and gas projects by underwriting the financial risks associated with spills, accidents, and long-term environmental damage. In Senegal, however, the absence of public disclosure regarding insurance and reinsurance arrangements creates a significant accountability gap. Communities, regulators, and national authorities lack the information necessary to assess whether coverage is adequate to address worst-case scenarios or whether multinational insurers' climate and human rights commitments are reflected in their underwriting decisions.

This opacity effectively shifts risk onto coastal communities and public institutions, leaving them exposed to environmental harm, economic loss, and public health crises in the event of an accident. Without transparency, the public cannot evaluate who ultimately bears responsibility for cleanup, compensation, or recovery, undermining trust, weakening governance, and further endangering communities already vulnerable to climate impacts.

Notably, Senegalese law requires local participation in oil and gas insurance, underscoring the importance of disclosure and accountability in these arrangements. Consistent with this requirement, Senegalese insurers formed an oil

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<sup>20</sup><https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/woodside-energy-files-arbitration-proceedings-against-senegal-2025-06-02/>

and gas insurance pool in 2019.<sup>21</sup> However, the expected insurance premium potential—estimated at 30–40 billion CFA francs for major projects—is far larger than what local insurers are capable of covering. It is highly likely that global insurance companies are involved in the projects as insurers and reinsurers; however, these contracts and insurance certificates have yet to be made public.

Of particular concern, is the lack of transparency surrounding the multinational insurance companies involved in the Senegal oil and gas projects. For example, in the case of a spill, explosion, or other disaster, it is unclear who holds responsibility for funding a clean up, paying for damages, and supporting the recovery of communities. Lastly, increasing global demand to shift away from fossil fuel projects presents a mounting challenge: some insurers are restricting coverage for new oil and gas projects in line with climate goals. This creates uncertainty for new producers like Senegal, which continue to seek insurance for expanding oil and gas projects, and places an immense burden on local communities.

### *Health Risks from Pollution and Lack of Community Notice*

Water contamination from offshore oil and gas operations can introduce toxic chemicals and hydrocarbons into drinking water, impacting human health. Communities dependent on fishing or coastal waters face increased exposure to polluted water, with potential consequences including gastrointestinal illness, skin conditions, and long-term toxic exposure.

Offshore oil and gas drilling also introduces microplastic pollution into the marine environment. Drilling fluids, synthetic-based muds, and polymer additives used in well construction often contain plastic polymers that can break down into microplastic particles that enter the ocean. Equipment degradation, such as the erosion of synthetic risers, pipelines, and protective coatings, also introduces microplastic fragments into surrounding waters. Studies show that petroleum-derived polymers and drilling-related microplastics accumulate in marine sediments and water columns near offshore infrastructure, with documented ecological impacts on plankton, fish, and benthic organisms.<sup>22</sup> As drilling expands, these chronic, often unregulated sources of microplastics add to an already escalating burden of plastic pollution in fragile marine ecosystems.

In February 2025, a gas leak was detected from GTA, but was not reported to the public for over a week. This incident is exemplary of the lack of transparency throughout the process, from environmental assessments to the production stage.

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<sup>21</sup>[https://www.lejecos.com/ASURANCE-PETROLIERE-ET-GAZIERE-AU-SENEGAL-Structuration-du-mar-che-risques-surdimensionnes-enjeux\\_a25062.html](https://www.lejecos.com/ASURANCE-PETROLIERE-ET-GAZIERE-AU-SENEGAL-Structuration-du-mar-che-risques-surdimensionnes-enjeux_a25062.html)

<sup>22</sup><https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0025326X24007082#:~:text=low20risk20level.-,Astract,than20that20of20other20sources>

While an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) was conducted for the GTA project before construction, the ESIA minimized the risks of oil spills, the increased risk of deep-sea drilling, the dangers posed by climate change, and the growing frequency of extreme storms; the impacts to human health, marine water quality, fish population; and failed to meet international standards for preventing disasters; lacked disaster relief plans; and failed to provide a safe waste management plan. Indeed, communities have been left out of the planning process, and have been unable to access contracts or other documents required to be public under Senegalese law. As the recent GTA leak illuminated, it is unclear whether the drilling projects have adequate emergency response and cleanup protocols.

### *Gas Flaring*

Gas flaring, the burning of gas associated with oil and gas extraction, has begun at GTA. Gas flaring is known to cause cardiovascular and respiratory problems. BP is currently facing a lawsuit for gas-flaring related cancer and deaths in Iraq.<sup>23</sup> A new report by Greenpeace revealed that BP failed to disclose emissions caused by flaring at its Iraq facilities.<sup>24</sup>

Recent research examining health impacts of gas flaring in North Dakota in the United States found that people 95 kilometers away can experience respiratory distress because of flaring. The paper found that a one percent increase in flaring can lead to a 0.73 percent increase in hospitalizations. Between 2007 and 2015, the Bakken area of North Dakota saw an increase of 11,000 hospitalizations compared to the same time period before the study.<sup>25</sup> Saint Louis in Senegal, a major city near the GTA facility, has a population density of 3,509 inhabitants/ km<sup>2</sup>. In 2014, the Bakken region of North Dakota had a population density of 2.7 inhabitants/ km<sup>2</sup>. The Saint Louis region of Senegal is over 1000 times more densely populated. This doesn't account for the health effects to fisherfolk and workers in closer proximity to the GTA facility.

In addition, a study by researchers at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill found that pollution from oil and gas flaring and venting resulted in \$7.4 billion in health damages annually in the United States.<sup>26</sup> The public health risks due to gas flaring are potentially enormous.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-68829899>

<sup>24</sup> [https://projects.uneearthed.greenpeace.org/big-oil-iraq/?\\_ga=2.210055253.1990837924.1733406956-973828137.1733406956](https://projects.uneearthed.greenpeace.org/big-oil-iraq/?_ga=2.210055253.1990837924.1733406956-973828137.1733406956)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272722000032?via3DiHub>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2024/oil-and-gas-flaring-linked-to-7-4-b-in-health-damages/>

## Conclusion

Senegal's offshore oil and gas expansion marks an important turning point for national policy and regional sustainability. Although fossil fuel development has been promoted as a source of economic growth, emerging evidence shows that these projects threaten the country's long-term environmental health, water security, and financial stability. Offshore drilling also exposes deeper structural problems: high levels of foreign control, opaque financing, rising debt risks, environmental damage, and inadequate notice and participation for affected communities.

Senegal's long-term prosperity will come from sustainable resource management that protects its waters and its people. By aligning energy policy with its climate commitments, Senegal can strengthen its leadership in the global shift away from fossil fuels and toward a fair, water-secure future.

Senegal's leaders still have a choice. By rejecting new fossil fuel expansion and investing instead in renewable energy, resilient fisheries, and transparent governance, the country can protect its most valuable resource: water. This path offers a sustainable future for Senegal and can help guide West Africa toward a just and healthy ocean-based economy.

## Recommendations

Senegal must adopt a policy framework that re-centers water, community health, and human rights in energy decision-making. This requires:

- **A moratorium on new offshore oil and gas projects.** Current offshore drilling operations must be halted and plans to expand must be suspended. Transparent, participatory, and rights-based environmental and social assessments should be conducted in line with international standards;
- **A public national audit of existing fossil fuel contracts and financing mechanisms,** ensuring fiscal accountability and debt sustainability;
- **Investment in renewable energy infrastructure and resilient blue economies,** particularly fisheries, that support local employment and food security, and solar energy, already the cheapest and most efficient energy option in Senegal;
- **Strengthened community notice and public input,** including disclosure of impact assessments, emergency response plans, and community engagement opportunities;

- **Adequate insurance coverage and transparency**, including the release of all insurance certificates to the public and an audit to ensure that insurance coverage adequately protects communities from the burden of potential risks.